A Study of Poetic Fantasy：

A moment of beauty, awe and wonder

ポエティック・ファンタジーについての一考察：美と驚異と不思議の一瞬

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要旨

1920 年代の英国における児童文学は低迷期とみなされる評価を多くの批評家たちから受けている。しかし、A. A. Milne、Hugh Lofting、John Masefield たちのすぐれた業績や後の世代に与えた影響を考えると、はたしてこの評価が適当であるのかどうが疑問が生じる。また、この時代の著名な作家たちが作品を寄せ、当時の英国に大きな影響力を持っていた年間作品集 *Joy Street* では poetic fantasy が強調され、そこに掲載された短編作品のいくつかはその後再版されたり、執筆した作家の短編集の中に編纂されて、現代まで読みつがれていることも注目すべき事実である。 本稿では、この poetic fantasy を中心になぜ 20 年代の作品の多くが今では忘れられた存在になってしまったのか、その一方で poetic fantasy を代表する二人の作家―Eleanor Farjeon と Walter de la Mare―の作品が現在でも高く評価され、出版が続けられているのはなぜなのかを考察する。さらに、二人の作品によく見られる美と驚異と不思議を描いた情景について分析する。

Introduction

The English juvenile literature of the 1920s is not highly-valued among critics. Marcus Crouch defines the children's literature of the decade as the 'Years Between' between the Edwardian Age and Renaissance which means the juvenile literature of

the 1930s. Crouch says as follows:

> The years between 1920 and 1929 witnessed international hopes and disappointments, booms and slumps, industrial unrest and a general strike which brought Britain nearer to revolution than it had been for nearly a century, queer extremes of fashion and social behavior. . . . .
>
> It is difficult to see much of this reflected in the children's literature of the decade. The mood was, in one way or another, escapist. Most of the best books were fantasies; the general run of popular books dealt with adventures, at home, at school and abroad, which were equally remote from everyday life. [1]

The fantasies of the 1920s and 1930s are bland, points out Sheila A. Egoff, as can be seen in the following quotation:

> In comparison with the memorable fantasies of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, those of the 1920's and 1930's appear to be rather bland. Certainly the writers stood aloof from any social considerations. No aspect of "the Gay Twenties" or the Great Depression of the Thirties or the rising clouds of World War II was allowed to impinge on fantasy.[2]

Moreover, Geoffrey Trease comments that "a new story in 1920 or 1930 tended to be a fossil in which one could trace the essential characteristics of one written in 1880 or 1890."[3] Although he admits that there were some outstanding contributions in fields outside of adventure stories, he insists that nothing memorable appeared in the field of adventure stories for a whole generation because ideas and values became ossified.[4]

Thus, the juvenile literature of the 1920s (sometimes including that of the 1930s) tends to be frowned upon by critics. It is, however, doubtful whether the valuation is proper or not, considering the achievements of A. A. Milne (1882-1956), Hugh Lofting (1886-1947), Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) and others and the influence the whole juvenile literature of the decade had upon the future generations. In any case, we can say the mainstream of the decade was fantasy. According to Crouch, "there was a strong emphasis . . . on poetic fantasy, and this is

maintained in most creative writing of the period."[5] I will consider poetic fantasy, especially its characteristics — the fascinations and weak points, dealing with two writers who represent poetic fantasy, Walter de la Mare and Eleanor Farjeon. I also explore here how their inner worlds create an original mood in their works, taking up their notable collections of short stories.

Ⅰ The Characteristics of Poetic Fantasy

Joy Street, a popular children's annual published from 1923 to 1938, probably had the greatest influence in England, because it was a meeting place for literally all the best writing for children, to use Crouch's words[6] and "drew to its pages most of the prominent writers of the time, including Walter de la Mare, Laurence Housman (1865-1959), Eleanor Farjeon, and A. A. Milne."[7] We can also find the names of Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), Hugh Walpole (1884-1941), G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and Lord Dunsany (1878-1957) in the annual, which not only had a magnificent lineup, but also pressed for higher quality in the fields of both prose and poetry. And we cannot fail to note that the wish to forget the devastation of World War I accounted for the overall mood of gentleness, which is a trend found in all children's books of the 1920s and 1930s. "The issues of *Joy Street* itself are marked by a soft poetic imagination as if its writers (and illustrators such as Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham)"[8] seemed to make stories of a golden age remote from reality. In those days, many writers, "whether in England or the United States, opted for the short story, either the literary fairy tale, the nonsense tale, retellings of the oral tradition, or the linked story with each chapter complete in itself, ..."[9] Therefore, poetic fantasy is characterized by fairy tales which symbolize three elements — fairyland, innocent children, and the beautiful and mild climate of England.

Why are most of the works which have such peculiar elements of poetic fantasy forgotten, despite being enjoyed by people in the 1920s? It's probably because their peculiarity is too strong in some cases. Some works of poetic fantasy are patterned

because many of their materials are fairy tales; we can easily tell the ending because most of them are simple short stories. In short, they are almost soporific, although they are elegant and contain charming variations on traditional tales. Furthermore, the fairies who used to play an active part in the literary world had become mere pets for children, and their magic power tended to become instructive means by which to teach lessons. In some of the traditional tales of poetic fantasy, almost everyone is good-natured, every mistake is easily mended by gentleness and honesty. The use of rhythmical words heighten the mild mood, which make readers feel almost cloyingly sweet.

In the 1920s, the general strike by coral miners was typical of the political and economic unrest in England; society was full of despair, irritation, hatred and spiritlessness. This phenomenon, however, hardly affected general literature. Some writers might have groped for new morals and lofty thoughts as a reflection of the collapse of antiquated ideas, order and society; most writers appeared to be unconcerned about politics and society and had been busy seeking their own art. Such was the tendency of general literature, so it's no wonder that children's literature was escapist. Many works for children written in those days placed children in a world of fairy tales set in the countryside of pre-industrial England with a beautiful landscape and a mild climate. Since children were generally regarded as innocent and weak in those days, adults thought they had to protect them against the storms of life and expected children to obey them without question. Such a viewpoint of children had crept into society since the Victorian age, and peaked in the Edwardian age. This viewpoint held true for children's literature, which was, however, exposed to severe criticism as the atmosphere shifted in response to the changing of the times. I will take an example to support this:

> My childhood — the twenties and early thirties — was the heyday of J. M. Barrie and of Christopher Robin, when children were seen by many people primarily as delicate, sensitive, small creatures, who ought properly to live in a world from which not only suffering, but to some extent reality, were excluded until they were older. This idea is not altogether false, of course, but

> at that time it was overdone, ...
>
> I personally felt resentful of this general atmosphere, which thwarted one's natural aggression while at the same time unfitting one for the rougher side of life, so that one felt — and hated knowing that one was justified in feeling — at a disadvantage. . . . . It was also a time when quite a lot of people tended to tell lies to children with a view to protecting them from apprehension, fear and grief. The trouble was that the lies tended to fall down.[10]

In the 1920s and 1930s, many writers described children's behaviors in their works, but hardly looked into their minds and hearts. Even some masterpieces, such as Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (1920), don't explore the inner workings of children though they have been loved and highly valued. Richard Adams admits there is a lot wrong with the Pooh books while defending them. Christopher Robin is not selfish at all and whole-heartedly loves his stuffed animals. Milne must have felt human innocence at its best in little children; a modest joy and refined egoism in childhood seen in Christopher Robin must have long fascinated readers.

We cannot deny that overdone characteristic of poetic fantasy may have enlarged a negative element as I have mentioned above. On the contrary, some writers have absorbed the same characteristic as a positive element, or as part of the charm of their own works. The quotation below illustrates that their works are highly valued even now:

> . . . at a time when children's literature in Great Britain had fallen away from its "Golden Age," Eleanor Farjeon, together with Walter de la Mare and John Masefield, managed to continue the creative force of fantasy writing through the 1920s and 1930s until new writers revitalized the mode in the 1940s.[11]

Both de la Mare and Farjeon have kept their own creative power. They neither went against the current of the times nor were buried in oblivion; in other words, they continued to create works in their own ways in order to interpret timeless themes,

because their imagination wandered as free as air, beyond the bounds of time and space. They were lifelong friends who had been compared to each other by critics owing to their success in both prose and verse. After World War II, they both won the Carnegie Medal: de la Mare's prize winner was *Collected Stories for Children* (1947) and Farjeon's *The Little Bookroom* (1955). Both winners were collections of short stories; most of the stories were first published in the 1920s and 1930s. De la Mare's *Collected Stories for Children* has 17 short stories: nine of them are included in *Broomsticks and Other Tales* (1925); seven in *The Lord Fish* (1933) (four of the seven were printed in *Joy Street* in the 1920s); the other one in *The Riddle and Other Stories* (1923). On the other hand, Farjeon's *The Little Bookroom* has 27 short stories: 16 of them, which were printed in *Joy Street* and other magazines, were selected out of *One-Foot in Fairyland* (1935); it is clear that some of the rest were printed in the 1920s and 1930s.

One of the reasons that *Collected Stories for Children* and *The Little Bookroom*, which we can say are books of the 1920s, ran into several editions is the two writers' viewpoints of children. The children Farjeon describes in her books are more lovely and have a more humorous quality than de la Mare's children; her children are good and trusting. The personalities of children may be weak in Farjeon's fantasy of fairy tales, but in her works, which have a strong realistic tinge, Farjeon grasps a firm insight of children through the events of daily life and explains in detail children's state of mind which still holds true today. Farjeon tenderly indicates some faults of ordinary children whom we can see anywhere and anytime, and sometimes drives them into a tight corner. De la Mare's children are a bit eccentric and sensitive; they have keen insight and strong power of observation. He mercilessly gives his children more severe trials and fear than Farjeon, and never indulges them. Most of his children are solitary and are not always under the wings of adults. Therefore, for all their seeming frailty, they face and overcome spiritual dangers. In this point, he is very different from his contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s who thought that the dark and complex sides of life were not suitable subject matter for children. All things considered, there is no doubt it is Farjeon's children who are loved by adults.

In other words, her children have inherited the elements of children from the previous age — loveliness, honesty and obedience — I mentioned before. From the viewpoint of today, however, de la Mare's children have a stronger personality and are also more full of life than Farjeon's children. He is clever in describing the conflict between children and adults and the tragedy that children are not easily understood by adults, which are troubles found even in today's works. Thus, de la Mare seems to be little more highly thought of than Farjeon.

II The Stage of Poetic Fantasy:
Beautiful English nature and traditional fairy tales

According to Crouch, the 1920s was "a period of fairy tales, real and artificial,"[12] because "the fairy tales of Hans Andersen continued to exercise their unique power. Between 1921 and 1925 no less than thirty-four editions were published, with a wide range of quality and for a variety of pockets."[13] Under these conditions, many writers of poetic fantasy such as Margaret Baker, Rose Fyleman and Madelain Nightingale used fairy tales as one of their vehicles as I mentioned in Chapter I. The fairyland they describe is the countryside of pre-World War I England, just as in the following quotation:

> Once inside, the King rubbed his eyes, for he could hardly believe them. . . . . For instead of a grey stretch of desert sand, the greenest of swards lay stretched before him, filled with gay streams and waterfalls, and groves of flowering trees; . . . , the mossy earth was blue with violets, birds of every feather flew in the air, dappled fawns drank at the streams, and squirrels gambolled on the sward. . . . .
>
> Beyond the groves a golden seashore lay, a lovely bay of glittering sand and shining shells and coloured pebbles; a blue-and-emerald sea, transparent as glass, ran the length of it in ripples, until it met the point of a gleaming cliff, in which were alabaster caves and hollows. Gulls, swans, and seabirds wheeled like silver streaks over the water, or stood preening their feathers on the sand.[14]

For writers of poetic fantasy, nature is their life environment and the object of their appreciation; it has nurtured them and become part of themselves; it is a big part of their heart. They create fairy tales filled with beautiful nature in order to take refuge from severe realities — the financial panic and World WarⅡ looming in the near future. Therefore, there is no denying that poetic fantasy is fundamentally escapist, but, on the other hand, it should not be criticized for that as long as it is literature. The writers of poetic fantasy probably wanted to convey their hatred of the din and bustle of cities and cold, suspicious human relations, and their sorrow and anger for nature being polluted by developing technology — to warn people against the danger that the rational world might reject an irrational world filled with love. However, they couldn't take large-scaled fairy tales beyond the bounds of rational society. Thus, their works were feeble and artificial; they neither impressed readers deeply nor made people tremble with fear even when having a glimpse of fairyland or another world. These works have omitted some of the essences of fairy tales — wonder and surprise. To put it another way, only the writers who can capture the very essences of fairy tales and have their own originality can continue to consistently create works that are critically acclaimed.

Both Farjeon and de la Mare adopt many fairy tales in their works, but they are never absorbed by fairy tales, rather their works are strengthened by fairy tales. Here let us view the two writers' works comparatively. The short stories of *The Little Bookroom* can be classified into two types. One is the traditional fairy tale set in an imaginary country; we cannot pinpoint when and where events occur in the stories. "The Seventh Princess" and "The Clumber Pup" are typical of this type. The other type is the realistic story based on children's daily life in England set in the same period as Farjeon's childhood or in a little earlier age; "The Connemara Donkey" and "Pennyworth" are good examples.

In the former, kings and queens who usually live in a different world, behave and worry like ordinary people; readers empathize with the characters in her fairy tales. Farjeon's characters are often described as funny or humorous persons, which indicates her firm grasp of her character development. One can cite many examples

which seem to support this, King John in “Westwoods” is treated on equal terms with and talked down to by his housemaid Selina; King Richard in “The Little Dressmaker” exchanges letters with his aunt, Queen Georgina in a free and easy manner.

In the latter, while the cold hard facts of the situation caused by old age, poverty and war are referred to, the power that links dreams with daily life has an effect on the works. Modest dreams, which don't seem to be fulfilled, are described as important desires for children. However, they inevitably come true through accidents or miracle for the heroes or heroines in Farjeon's works. Griselda in “And I Dance Mine Own Child” can live again in her own house with her great-grandmother who used to be in the Almshouse, because the old book which was handed down from her great-great-great-grandmother was found to be valuable — worth fifty pounds — by accident. Cathy, an evacuee, in “San Fairy Ann” had her doll, San Fairy Ann hurled into the middle of a pond by Johnny, a dull-witted boy. Fortunately, the doll was fished out by Mrs. Lane, who was the previous owner of the doll, and Cathy herself was taken charge of by Mr. and Mrs. Lane. The development of the story can be regarded as a miracle.

In Farjeon's fairy tales, even where magic power is used, characters hold their own territory and never invade others' territories: human beings exchange no words with animals; animals talk with each other only in dreams. The wonder which recklessly goes beyond the ordinary would destroy the story itself.

Farjeon's world, where daily life filters into dreams and dreams flow into daily life, is constructed by the description of beautiful nature and the sense of an ordinary and steady life and a little biting sense of humor. Thus, her fantasy is gentle and homely. Her fairy tales are, however, not only sentimental but also severe; the balance of the bitter and the sweet gives the whole story a kind of pleasant tension. We can compare her stories to pretty cakes whose outsides are soft and sweet and insides are spicy.

“Once upon a time,” the words at the beginning of traditional stories instantly take listeners or readers from this actual world into another world which cannot be controlled by daily logic and rules, and draw a boundary line between reality and

fiction. The words also abstract the story — at a certain place and one day. In Farjeon's *The Little Bookroom*, most of the fariy stories don't make the places clear, whereas six stories in de la Mare's *Collected Stories for Children* are set in real places and ages, despite their traditional pattern and elements such as fairies, giants and magic. The following are examples: "Dick and the Beanstalk" is set in the country of Gloucestershire; the story of "The Three Sleeping Boys of Warkwickshire" starts about the year 1600, when Queen Elizabeth was sixty-seven, twenty-four miles from Stratford-on-Avon; Myfanwy in "The Lovely Myfanwy" lived in an old castle under the forested mountains of the Welsh Marches; a young man called John Cobbler in "The Lord Fish" lived in the village of Tussock in Wiltshire.

In this way, de la Mare's clarifies place names or ages to show that his supernatural world exists in the real world. A more remarkable point is de la Mare's realistic and detailed description, because traditional stories have little concrete description. In the following passage from "The Lord Fish," readers can feel as if they themselves are transformed into fish.

> And with that, at once, a dreadful darkness and giddiness swept over him [John Cobbler]. He felt his body narrowing and shortening and shrinking and dwindling. His bones were drawing themselves together inside his skin; his arms and legs ceased at last to wave and scuffle, his eyes seemed to be settling into his head. The next moment, with one convulsive twist of his whole body, he had fallen plump into the water. There he lay a while in a motionless horror. Then he began to stir again, ...
>
> For when he twisted himself about to see what had happened to him, a sight indeed met his eye. Where once had been arms were now small blunt fins. A gristly little beard or barbel hung on either side of his mouth. His short dumpy body was of a greeny brown, and for human legs he could boast of nothing now but a fluted wavering tail.[15]

In the description below, we may be momentarily under the illusion that de la Mare himself might have climbed the beanstalk.

> He [Dick] went close and tugged with all his might at the tangle of stalks. . . . . Once more he tugged; the stalks were tough as leather. And he began to climb.
>
> But he made slow progress. The harsh withered strands of the bean-bines not only cut into his hands but were crusted over with rime, and his hands and feet were soon numb with cold. He stayed breathless and panting, not venturing yet to look down. On he went, and after perhaps a full hour's steady climbing, he stayed again and gazed about him. And a marvellous scene now met his eyes. His head swam with the strangeness of it.
>
> Low in the heavens hung the red globe of the sun, and beneath him lay the vast saucer of the world. . . . .
>
> Having come so high, Dick could not resist climbing higher. So on he went. . . . , at last he reached the top of the Beanstalk. There he sat down to rest. He found himself in a country of low, smooth, but very wide hills and of wide gentle valleys.[16]

Farjeon's stories draw readers by a human touch and the ordinary quality of her characters, while de la Mare's readers become immersed in his fairy tales before they know it, because of his realistic description which can be seen in the previous quotations. Since de la Mare vividly describes fictitious characters and happenings, we feel as if we could look deep into heart. To put it another way, his other world is very close to the actual world, but seems to be space which is incompatible with daily life.

It is important that both Farjeon's and de la Mare's fairy tales have their own originality and reality though each of their special abilities is different. They cleverly make the best of traditional fairy tales they have a thorough knowledge of; their individuality is not crushed by the tradition and pattern of fairy tales.

Here, we refer to their domestic environment in their childhood. De la Mare's free, easy, rich and imaginative power must have been cultivated by the old rhymes he had been sung and by fairy tales or folklore he had been told in his childhood when the boundary between actuality and fancy were obscure, just like Dick in "Dick and the Beanstalk," as follows:

> These tales not only stayed in Dick's head, but *lived* there. He not only remembered them, but thought about them; and he sometimes dreamed about them. He not only knew almost by heart what they told, but would please himself by fancying what else had happened to the people in them after the tales were over or before they had begun. He could not only find his way about in a story-book, chapter by chapter, page by page, but if it told only about the inside of a house he would begin to wonder what its garden was like — and in imagination would find his way out into it and then perhaps try to explore even further.[17]

In this way, Dick (probably little de la Mare) knew on which finger Aladdin wore his ring, the colour of his uncle the Magician's eyes, what at last happened to the old Fairy Woman in *The Sleeping Beauty* and so on. It may be worth mentioning in passing that the hero, Henry Brocken in *Henry Brocken* (1904), de la Mare's first novel, is travelling on horseback in the book-world. On the way, Henry meets Wordsworth's Lucy Gray, Brontë's Jane Eyre, Shakespeare's Nick Bottom, Swift's Lemuel Gulliver, Chaucer's Criseyde, Sleeping Beauty and others.

Farjeon read voluminously in her childhood, encouraged by her father, an unequaled bookworm and popular writer. She formed her fertile imaginative power by playing a game called TAR for about 25 years — through a kind of self-hypnosis Farjeon and her elder brother Harry would take on roles of personages from drama, literature, history and life for many hours. It is clear that since Farjeon and de la Mare fully comprehended and absorbed the essences of traditional fairy tales and old rhymes, they could create profound and significant original works of good quality.

Ⅲ　A Moment of Miracle

Farjeon and de la Mare each contributed a short story to *Number One Joy Street* (1923). Farjeon's "Tom Cobble and Ooney" was full of humor and in due course was incorporated into *Martin Pippin in the Daisy-Field* (1937), one of her masterpieces. De la Mare's "Miss Jemima" was later included in *Broomsticks and Other Tales* (1925),

his major collection of short stories, where “the finest and most enduring of the original stories are gathered together.”[18] “Miss Jemima” was issued by Blackwell in 1929 at one shilling and also in America in 1930 and 1940; finally it was included in *Collected Stories for Children* I have mentioned previously.

The heroes and heroines of these short stories encounter a fairy. A boy named Tom Cobble is kidnapped by a fairy, spends seven years as an apprentice in Fairyland, and then returns to his village. A girl named Susan in “Miss Jemima” lives a lonely existence with her seriously ill Uncle James and his wicked housekeeper, Miss Jemima, apart from her parents. Susan sees a beautiful, yet ghastly fairy — a fairy's face, strictly speaking — and is almost dragged into another world. Thus, the two writers describe the exchange between this rational world and Fairyland from the viewpoint of children. They must have always felt close to another world, all the while never losing their touch with reality, devoting themselves to writing.

De la Mare often and vividly describes the feelings that a child experiences upon failing to enter another world when tempted out just like Susan. The following poem named “Sleepyhead” is a typical example.

As I lay awake in the white moon light,
I heard a faint singing in the wood,
‘Out of bed,
Sleepyhead,
Put your white foot now,
Here are we,
Neath the tree,
Singing round the root now!’

I looked out of window, in the white moon light,
The trees were like snow in the wood —
‘Come away,
Child, and play
Light with the gnomies;
In a mound,
Green and round,
That’s where their home is.

Honey sweet,
Curds to eat,
Cream and fruménty,
Shells and beads,
Poppy seeds,
You shall have plenty.'

But soon as I stooped in the dim moon light
To put on my stocking and my shoe,
The sweet sweet singing died sadly away,
And the light of the morning peeped through:
Then instead of the gnomies there came a red robin
To sing of the buttercups and dew.[19]

Fascinated by the white moonlight and a sweet singing heard from nowhere, a child puts on his stocking and shoe light-heartedly and is rising from his bed, when the light fades out and the singing dies. Instead, the light of the morning peeps through and a red robin begins to chirp. The child is in fear of, but is hopeful of seeing a gnome (a fairy) in the beautiful and faint scene lit up with the moonlight; with a moment's hesitation but curiosity about the unknown he goes out; in the bright sunlight he has a bittersweet disappointment. The child comes to the entrance of Fairyland and grasps the knob of the door and comes very close to going inside. He deeply regrets that he has lost a rare chance, and at the same time feels relieved. All the feelings — admiration, hope, joy, disappointment and relief — he experiences in a very short time affect readers very poignantly. In short, this poem evokes our memories of childhood.

Lillian H. Smith is correct when she says: "The influence of De la Mare's poetry on children themselves is that of an awakening of minds, hearts, and imaginations to wonder, to a sense of beauty unseen, ... "[20] She goes to say:

> . . . he [de la Mare] trusts wholly to their [children's] intuitive response to wonder and beauty. . . . . Children apprehend by intuition and imagination that which is far beyond their limited experience. In their reading of true poetry, . . . , they are also finding an expression for thoughts and feelings of

which they are but dimly aware.[21]

When we — both children and adults — read de la Mare's poems, all the senses are stimulated and a feeling of comradery develops between us and the heroes or heroines. The same is true of his short stories and novels. The sense of unity, namely the marvelous moment is described more vividly and more precisely in prose; we can fully enjoy wonder and beauty. Here, for example, is a passage from "A Penny a Day."

> But when she [Griselda] opened them [her eyes], and looked out of her body, a change had come upon the scene around her — garden, cottage, castle walls and ruined turrets, cliffs, sea and caves — all had vanished. No evening ray of sun shone here, not the faintest sea-breeze stirred the air. It was a place utterly still, and lay bathed in a half-light pale and green, rilling in from she knew not where. And around her, and above her head, faint colours shimmered in the quarried quartz of the grottoes. And the only sound to be heard was a distant sighing, as of the tide.
>
> There were many trees here, too, in the orchards . . . . And their branches were laden with fruits of as many colours as there are precious stones. And there was a charm of birds singing, though Griselda could see none. The very air seemed thin and fine in this dim and sea-green light: . . . .[22]

"The Magic Jacket" is another illustration of the same point.

> I [Mike] put it [the magic jacket] on. And nothing happened. Nothing whatever. At first blush, I mean. Except that I suddenly noticed that the room was full of sunshine and that a thrush was singing in a pear tree at the bottom of the garden. I noticed it because he sang so clear and shrill, and as though straight at *me*. If you could put sound for sight, it was as if I were listening to him through a telescope. I could see him, too, the speckles on his breast, and his bill opening and shutting — singing like an angel. . . . .
>
> 'Well, I was soon a little impatient with all this — a new life seemed to have edged into things, or at least into me. Very peculiar.[23]

These supernatural phenomena usually occur in a moment near the climax of the story; the rest of the story is the accumulation of elaborate description in preparation

for the climax. Therefore, the whole story impresses us as being very realistic. In short stories, such phenomena occur more than once; (the time required becomes longer) each time they occur, wonder and beauty grow; when the story reaches the climax, all vanishes and a strange aftertaste lingers in a hero's or heroine's heart forever. Such supernatural phenomena usually befall a solitary boy or girl, which is one of de la Mare's characteristics in his works of the 1920s. De la Mare thinks that only children believe in miracles, that only pure innocent children have links to miracles. We should not overlook that most solitary children who have a supernatural experience are very close to a mental crisis without being aware of it — they are losing their identity.

Susan in "Miss Jemima" has no company to play with; she is "made to feel more homesick than ever by the cold glances and cold tongue of Miss Jemima."[24] When Susan is scolded by her, she runs away to the churchyard, where she meets a beautiful fairy. And at the funeral of Uncle James, Susan meets the fairy again. Jean Elspeth in "Lucy" is alienated from her family members in the well-ordered house, being a little untidy. When she is alone, she often meets a phantom girl named Lucy. Griselda in "A Penny a Day" has to work nearly all her waking hours to support herself and her old ill grandmother, but she never escapes her impoverished situation. And one early morning, she found "that the hungry mice had stolen more than half of the handful of oatmeal she had left in the cupboard, and that her little crock of milk had turned sour, her heart all but failed her."[25] Just then "an old wizened pygmy hunched-up old man"[26] appeared to save her from her predicament. Because of his magic power, Griselda sees a heavenly beautiful sight with her own eyes.

Myfanwy in "The Lovely Myfanwy", the only daughter of Lord of Eggleyseg, was lovely indeed. Since the lord loved his daughter so dearly, Myfanwy was forbidden to stray but a few paces beyond the precincts of his castle and was watched closely. One early evening, through the gates, Myfanwy saw a young man and fell in love with him. She was obsessed by love and said to her father, ". . . , alas, if I never see him again, I shall wither up and die."[27] Knowing that, her father, whom "rage, hatred and envy . . . boiled up in,"[28] munched the magic apple the youth gave her. Just then, he

transmogrified into an ass!

Sandy in "The Magic Jacket" can't tell his father, who hoped that his son would follow him into his grocery business, that he would like to be a sailor. His father, a sharp tradesman, was very impatient and was constantly angry with his quiet, fainthearted and glum son. The discord between Sandy and his father was growing more than Sandy could bear, when he passed a dingy little shop named *Marine Store*. He found a magic jacket there and got it. As soon as he put it on, "the room was full of sunshine . . . a new life seemed to have edged into things, or at least into [him] . . . . Whatever, within the bounds of reason, or thereabouts, [he] gave [himself] to do, [he] *did* — and with ease. Like the thrush singing . . . ."[29]

As stated above, children can get through their crises thanks to miracles or magic. Before that, however, they have to endure the severe trials of life — grief and hardships .

The same may be said, no doubt, of Farjeon's works. In her short stories about children's daily lives, to realize their dreams or desires, they must undergo some trial as a kind of payment. Griselda in "And I Dance Mine Own Child" was hospitalized for three months owing to fever; meanwhile, she lost her rent-house and her great-grandmother, her only one blood relation, was sent to the Almshouse. When she fell down, she was physically and mentally exhausted. Cathy in "San Fairy Ann" was a war orphan; her doll named San Fairy Ann was her only treasure and was a symbol of her past happiness. So, she was driven to the depths of despair when her doll was hurled far into the middle of a pond by a village boy. Cathy would not reveal her broken heart to the unfeeling people in the village; she would suffer in silence; her pain went deep and her lips were sealed. Lois in "The Miracle of the Poor Island" sacrifices for the Queen a small white rose-bush she tended. Marietta in "The Girl Who Kissed the Peach-tree" was nearly engulfed in the lava that flowed from the volcano. Danny in "The Connemara Donkey" was bantered by his classmates, "Danny's wonky," because he always talked big. One day he was involved in a traffic accident after being accused of being a liar.

Farjeon illustrates in her stories how ordinary people struggle to live their lives.

When their modest lives are about to collapse, miracles happen. Then we are inclined to believe in the existence of God. In “The Miracle of the Poor Island,” all the children knelt upon the rocks and prayed with the pastor when the tide rushed in and surrounded the Poor Island. And as “the wild green waves with their white caps rolled to the very feet of the Poor Islanders,”[30] the Queen, who had died, herself appeared in the pale light and saved the people. In “The Girl Who Kissed the Peach-tree,” Marietta prayed until she grew tired of kneeling before Saint Anthony; the King of the Mountains then saved Marietta, her peach-tree and the villagers.

Farjeon seems to insist that only the people who live honestly and believe in God without a shadow of doubt can be the recipient of a gift from God. Farjeon’s miracles happen in daily life to help her main characters out of difficulties. As for de la Mare, his miracles mean that his main characters get a glimpse of another world which is very close to us but goes unseen by most people. Only innocent minds can lift the thin veil which separates the two worlds. In other words, the lucky children are thrown into ecstasies at the splendid sight of another world; they are absorbed in the mysterious music; they are enchanted by a beautiful fairy.

Ⅳ　How do Miracles Happen?

How do the miracles de la Mare and Farjeon show — the moments of beauty, awe and wonder — happen? In Farjeon’s case, she had a special faculty of going to and from the dream world in a flash by a kind of game called TAR which she kept on playing for more than 20 years. It is clear that her dreams have their origins in the books she had read avidly, namely, poems, fictions, legends and romance she had enjoyed reading since her childhood.

> That dusty bookroom, whose windows were never opened, . . . , opened magic casements for me through which I looked out on other worlds and times than those I lived in: worlds filled with poetry and prose and fact and fantasy. There were old plays and histories, and old romances; superstitions,

> legends, ... Crammed with all sorts of reading, the narrow shelves rose halfway up the walls; their tops piled with untidy layers that almost touched the ceiling. . . . . Here, in the Little Bookroom, I learned, like Charles Lamb, to read anything that can be called a book. The dust got up my nose and made my eyes smart, as I crouched on the floor or stood propped against a bookcase, physically uncomfortable, and mentally lost. I was only conscious of my awkward posture and the stifling atmosphere when I had ceased to wander in realms where fancy seemed to me more true than facts, and set sail on voyages of discovery to regions in which fact was often far more curious than fancy.[31]

As stated above, in Farjeon's works, dreams flow into daily life and everyday affairs filter into dreams. Thus, she states: "No wonder that many years later, when I came to write books myself, they were a muddle of fiction and fact and fantasy and truth. I have never quite succeeded in distinguishing one from the other, ..."[32] A good example of the "muddle" of fiction and fact and fantasy and truth is "Elsie Piddock Skips in Her Sleep," which is Eleanor Farjeon's personal favorite. Elsie is a born skipper; she skipped in her sleep with the fairies and learnt not only the Long Skip and the Strong Skip, but the skip against Trouble, and many others besides. This story is "brilliantly written and links the imaginary world with every day in a completely satisfying way,"[33] to borrow Eileen Colwell's phrase. Farjeon, however, doesn't confuse realities with dreams; she fully recognizes the boundary ; she knows that some people can cross it and others cannot. Naturally Farjeon can freely pass the boundary, just like Elsie Piddock.

Farjeon illustrates in "Westwoods," the danger of people losing their dreams when the boundary grows too big. In the Kingdom of Workaday, "they did not believe in nonsense . . . , and they kept their noses so close to their jobs that they couldn't see anything beyond them."[34] No one knew what lay in the West, for it was forbidden for them to pass the fence that stood between them and the country beyond. But they believed that Westwoods was a desolate wasteland, inhabited by witches. The fence, which looked as old as time, was built too high for a child to see over, and knit too close for a child to peep through. "No Workaday child ever lost its wish to get into

Westwoods until it grew up and got married and had a child of its own."[35] Only Selina, who was a housemaid, but in fact, a Princess in Westwoods, could get in Westwoods on all her days off, through a hole in the fence. One day, the young King of Workaday, John, led by Selina, squeezed through a hole — the Seven-Hundred-and-Seventy-Seventh slat swung (back) like a narrow door — and rubbed his eyes, because the sight in front of him was very different from before. When he rode into Westwoods alone before, his first feeling was one of disappointment. For it was nothing but a wasteland of flat grey sand, as flat as a plate, and like a desert in size. This time, "instead of a grey stretch of desert sand, the greenest of swards lay stretched before him, filled with gay streams and waterfalls, and groves of flowering trees; . . . . Everything was bathed in radiant light, like mingled sun and moonshine, and was as it is in the loveliest dreams."[36] And "on the day of the wedding the King removed for good and all the Seven-Hundred-and-Seventy-Seventh slat in the fence between Workaday and Westwoods."[37] Westwoods is our dream and the origin of our imagination. Removing not all the slates but only one slate implies Farjeon's viewpoint of dream and reality. At the end of the story, "any child or grown-up [could] slip through for ever after: unless it had grown too fat, ..."[38] This phrase means that only the persons who have hopes and imagination can pass through the fence and enter another world. Moreover, all the children, who trooped after the King and Selina, easily squeezed through after them. This shows the general viewpoint of children in those days: the innocence of children was regarded as important.

King John was attached to his original poem though he threw it into the wastepaper basket at the beginning of the story; Selina put it her pocket and took it when they entered Westwoods together. This suggests that the inspiration and imagination poets have, by their exquisite words and sounds, stir up the hearts of those who read them. Farjeon's miracles happen when dreams come true in everyday life by the power of imagination. To enjoy being in the imaginary world without being addicted to dreams is to have an eye to see through lies hidden in realities. Farjeon fully realizes that it is important to have a dream, but it is possible that realities are

distorted or lost by dreams. For she had had a long and bitter experience to become an independent writer out of the life where she was addicted to TAR.

Turning now to de la Mare, they say, as W. H. Auden in fact does, that de la Mare possessed the rare gift of having visions while awake, like Blake.[39] He can describe the impossible as if it was possible. This faculty may be based on what C. D. Lewis called "the contemplation," as can be seen in the following quotation :

> . . . the poet develops his poetic faculty through contemplation — that is to say, by looking steadily both at the world outside him and the things that happen inside him, by using all his senses to *feel* the wonder, the sadness and the excitement of life, and by trying all the time to grasp the mysterious pattern which underlies it.[40]

De la Mare can see, in the real world, what is invisible to the naked eye, or through imagination can reflect the inner world as an image on the screen called the real world. In this way, de la Mare's miracles are created, and are described as wonder in his fantasy works.

We should now look more carefully into his miracle through "The Scarecrow." This short story was first issued in *Number Three Joy Street* (1925), entitled "Old Joe"; it was included in *The Lord Fish* (1933) under the new title of "Hodmadod"; finally it was found in *Collected Stories for Children* (1947) with the title of "The Scarecrow." "The Scarecrow" is "an excellent example of one of his favorite technical devices,"[41] used before in "The Almond Tree" and "Miss Jemima", for instance. An elderly person tells a child what happened in his childhood. In this story, old Mr. Bolsover tells his small niece, Letitia (she calls him Tim) how he saw a fairy in the country when he was ten. He used to stay with an old friend of his mother's and enjoy himself in the surrounding countryside where he looked for rare birds. A scarecrow, Old Joe, "an antiquated hodmadod" was his friend or brother.

One day, all of a sudden, Tim was surprised to find Old Joe glaring straight at him across the field. "For that one instant it seemed as if [Tim] could see the very colour of his eyeballs moving in his head"[42]— as if Old Joe was living. This accident was the

beginning of all; the boy Tim set foot into another world. Readers are led little by little to the moment of a miracle. Only one strange happening may be a mere chance incident. In de la Mare's works, the hero or heroine usually has several strange experiences even in an instant.

First, Tim felt the presence of someone, because he "was perfectly certain that somebody or something was actually looking at［him］from . . . ."[43] Next he "was perfectly certain［he］had caught a glimpse of something moving there."[44] And at twilight one day, "it seemed that almost every moment Old Joe, inch by inch, was steadily moving nearer. . . . . And then, at the very instant when［Tim］noticed the first star,"[45] he saw the fairy. He could not explain his mental state at the moment he saw the fairy because of the complexity of his feelings.

> "The fairy. And the odd thing is that I [Tim] can't — can't possibly — describe her. This is perhaps partly because the light wasn't very good, and partly because my eyes were strained with watching. But mostly for other reasons. I seemed, you see, to be seeing her as *if* I were imagining her, even though I knew quite well she was there.[46]

The quotation above gives us an impression that Tim saw a divine angel — fear that is a kind of respect and awe that makes one shudder. The severe shock and strange experience he received is expressed best in the following passage:

> "She [The fairy] stood lovely and motionless as a flower. And merely to gaze at her filled me with a happiness I shall not forget but cannot describe. It was as though I had come without knowing it into the middle of a dream in another world; and cold prickles went down my back, as if at the sound of enchanted music.[47]

When Tim saw the fairy for the third time, a violent shudder ran through his body: ". . . I suddenly went cold all over, and I firmly believe my cap pushed itself up a little on the top of my head, owing to the hair underneath it trying to stand on end."[48] Then he, by accident but clearly, saw the fairy's face and stared steadily into her eyes. The

fairy's terrible beauty shocked Tim so immensely that he had completely forgotten all else in the world. Moreover, the fairy and Tim were conscious of each other's existence, exchanging no words and standing motionless. For Tim "knew not only that the fairy was there again but also that again she was aware she was being watched."[49] And they could read each other's thoughts:

> But as I looked . . . there did come a faint far-away change in her eyes. . . . . This was *her* way of smiling at *me*. . . . . It told me in my heart of hearts that she was not unfriendly to me; and yet that she was entreating me to come no more and trespass near her lair. . . . . All she was *telling* me was that she meant me no harm but begged me not to spy on her or watch her any more.[50]

And then she was gone; thereafter, Tim was never to see her again, "nor anything resembling her."[51]

Later, Tim realized Old Joe was "merely one of this particular fairy's rendyvouses, as the old word goes,"[52] or "*her* dwelling-place, her hiding-place, her habitation: at least whenever she needed one,"[53] or "merely her way of getting into and out of *our* world."[54] Whatever Old Joe is, it is clear that Tim felt as if he had become a part of the scarecrow, Old Joe, and then he became aware of a fairy watching him.

Through this story, de la Mare precisely describes how miracles happen, from the sign of the fairy's appearance to the lingering imagery after its departure. His realistic description makes us feel that it is a confession of his own experience, because there is an air of reality in the story.

For de la Mare, the truth is not always what is visible to the naked eye; what is visible only to the inward eye is the truth. According to W. H. Auden, "his view . . . , is that our eyes and ears do not lie to us, but do not, perhaps cannot, tell us the whole truth, and that those who deny this, end up by actually narrowing their vision."[55] Therefore, de la Mare insists that "what is called realism is usually a record of life at a low pitch and ebb viewed in the sunless light of day — so often a drab waste of grey and white, and an east wind blowing."[56]

Conclusion

> When the spirit has been thus quickened by some preexistent manifestation, it suffers recognition and revelation at the same time. It recognizes something identical with itself in the revelation, and is surprised but not alarmed by it.
>
> These surprises do not only occur in the region of thought, in the mind's eye, or the poet's spiritual ear for overtones. Rare moments of vision occur in the physical world, among scenes and objects we may see a thousand times, yet only once divested of solid attributes, and left as it were in essence on our senses. Something in oneself, something in the atmosphere, some combination of light and imagination tune in together, and beauty shines like a star through the mortal vesture.[57]

Little attention has been given to the connection between Farjeon and vision, as compared with de la Mare. What the passage above makes clear at once is that Farjeon was also a visionary. Farjeon says that probably everyone has a chance to see a vision in everyday life. Few people, however, have noticed their own chances, namely, miracles around themselves. To illustrate that her theory above holds truth, Farjeon cites an interesting episode as follows:

> At another time rarefied vision was combined with rarefied sound. I was walking in sunlight on the base of Amberley Mount, and heard sudden bright light laughter, and the cantering of unseen horses. A moment later a company of riders streamed over the rim of the Mount. They were young, young horsemen and young horsewomen, ... It seemed as though some irresponsible, spontaneous impulse had brought them into being and set them in movement, as though they had been born out of the very air at that very moment, to leap upon their new-born horses and ride away into the moment to come. They followed the line of the green dome above me, and vanished, touched with miraculous sunlight. When they were out of sight I heard their ringing laughter, thinning away. Were they real? Had I imagined them? . . . .
>
> Of course they were real; but what I saw was the super-reality of which a poet makes poetry. The companion of that walk saw what I saw.[58]

I suppose that “the companion” in the passage above is de la Mare, a lifelong friend of hers. It would be “the super-reality” that is the origin of Farjeon's and de la Mare's miracles which create beauty, surprise and wonder — their poetical imagination or inspiration. They have recorded the moments they may have experienced, “the super-reality,” in their works I have mentioned in this paper. The super-reality would be an essence that purified and raised their poetic fantasy. That's why their poetry and prose carry “an impact that goes beyond the narrow meaning of words and that has to do with the resonance their combination creates for the ear.”[59] In other words, in the writings of Farjeon and de la Mare, “there is evident a quality which can only be called poetic overtone.”[60] In their use of words, there is often an evocation of more than what is actually said on the printed page.

Their momentary miracle experiences remind us of the theory of William James (1842-1910), America's foremost psychologist :

> . . . our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, while all about it parted from it by the filmiest of screens there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.[61]

Ken Wilber (1949-) takes a similar view:

> It is as if our everyday awareness were but an insignificant island, surrounded by a vast ocean of unsuspected and uncharted consciousness, whose waves beat continuously upon the barrier reefs of our normal awareness, until, quite spontaneously, they may break through, flooding our island awareness with knowledge of a vast, largely unexplored, but intensely real domain of new-world consciousness.[62]

When, for some reason, “the filmiest of screens” was lifted up, or waves broke through “the barrier reefs of their normal awareness,” Farjeon and de la Mare may have had awesome and illuminating experiences as if they were “fundamentally one with the entire universe, with all worlds.”[63] Their sense of identity, which expands far beyond the narrow confines of mind and body, would correspond to having a vision while

awake like Blake. Turning from this unity of consciousness, we usually and progressively limit our world and embrace boundaries. Therefore, we believe the boundary to be real; we tend to view the opposites — night and day, life and death, love and hate, good and evil, self and other, this world and another world — as quite different, irreconcilable and separate. That's why Farjeon and de la Mare, who are unconsciously identified with the all, must have had strange and unbelievable experiences, or visions. Moreover, "in ultimate reality there are no boundaries,"[64] states Ken Wilber, because all opposites are actually aspects of one underlying reality — such things as light and shadow, black and white are different aspects of the same thing — and reality is freed from all boundaries. Reflection on these will make us understand why de la Mare could describe vividly what was impossible as possible, or rather, his views of realism I mentioned at the end of chapter Ⅳ and why Farjeon experienced a rare moment of vision which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The same is true of "self." "We all have the feeling of 'self ' on one hand and the feeling of the external world on the other. But if we carefully look at the sensation of 'self-in-here' and the sensation of 'world-out-there,' we will find that these two sensations are actually *one and the same feeling*."[65] Thus, we realize that the inside and the outside, the subject and the object, the seer and the seen are one. We are now able to see why Tim and the fairy in "The Scarecrow" could understand each other without saying a word.

According to Ken Wilber, "most of us would have to admit that we have known moments, peak moments, which seemed indeed to lie so far beyond time that the past and the future melted away into obscurity."[66] Boys and girls in Farjeon's and de la Mare's works, too, experience peak moments when miracles happen. Then time appears suspended because they are totally absorbed in the moment, in which there is neither a beginning nor ending. Their peak moment is a timeless moment, namely, an eternal one. "To enter deeply into this present moment is thus to plunge into eternity, to step through the looking glass and into the world of the Unborn and the Undying."[67] And all the while, they see nothing but miracles and forget all about the

real life. Therefore, poetic fantasy and its writers are often criticized as escapist.

The English juvenile literature of the 1920s typified by poetic fantasy has unfortunately given rise to some imitations that separate children from the dark and cruel aspects of human nature and from the inconsistent and false sides of life and society, because of their stressed optimism, gentleness, generosity and a kind of escape. The best of poetic fantasy, however, by its rich imagination and keen sight, has showed us every beauty in this world, a broad view of things and the significance of life.

《 Notes 》

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